



A Critical Review of the Literature of the Antarctic Heritage Trust and the Mawson's Huts Foundation.

ANTA 602
Literature Review

Henry Redmond

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Introduction

Place History and Identity

Human endeavour exists within the context of time and space.

The context of time is lineal and ephemeral. An event takes place only once and is then the subject of oral, visual or written history. Its existence and immediacy is transitory in the context of time.

Perhaps as a response to the transitory nature of human existence mankind seeks to maintain tangible links with the past.

New Zealand holds closely to a written treaty that we see as a touchstone with our recent past. The Treaty of Waitangi is not only the cornerstone of race relations it has major ramifications in our country in all areas of economic and social reality. It defines who we are as a nation. It is a tangible connection with history.

Whether mankind reveres a treaty or the building in which that treaty was signed, it is universal that we hold as central and important such objects that take us closer to our transitory and ephemeral past.

Antarctica stands unique in that the first human dwellings built on the continent are still intact. In fact, all human endeavours in Antarctica have taken place within the space of just over two centuries and much of it is still in existence.

Time has passed since the 'Heroic Age' of exploration, but, the actual dwellings connected with the Heroic Age of exploration are still with us.

Those basic huts erected by Scott, Shackleton and Borchgrevink are tangible links with our past and as such take on an importance far beyond their physical entity. They are as powerful in our country's collective consciousness as the Liberty Bell is for the United States or the Stone of Scone is for Scotland.

They have the power to fire the collective imagination and they remain potent symbols of our nation's identity.

As such they have an importance to New Zealand's sense of national identity far in excess of their physical entity.

Our closest neighbour, Australia, has an Antarctic history equally as important to them and the preservation and restoration of their Antarctic heritage is similarly seen as vitally important to their sense of national identity. The importance of Australia's greatest Antarctic explorer, Douglas

Mawson, is esteemed so highly in their national consciousness that he features on their \$100 dollar bill. Ed Hillary only features on our \$5 dollar bill! Could this be indicative of the relative importance the Australians attach to their Antarctic history?

In Australia the preservation and restoration of Antarctic heritage is charged to the Mawson's Huts Foundation.

New Zealand's Antarctic Heritage Trust (AHT) was formed in 1987, nine years earlier than the Mawson's Huts Foundation (MHF).

The AHT is an independent charitable trust based in Christchurch.

The AHT is charged with the preservation and restoration of our Antarctic heritage. More specifically, it was created to care for sites important to the history of the Heroic Age of exploration located in the Ross Sea region of Antarctica

The Antarctic Heritage Trust and the Mawson's Huts Foundation are effectively parallel societies undertaking comparable roles in neighbouring countries. Countries who share much in common in their development, nationhood and ethos on the international stage.

Methodology

Comparative literature review of the Antarctic Heritage Trust and the Mawson's Hut Foundation

The aim of this review is to analyse and assess the literature; websites, books and magazines and determine how well New Zealand's Antarctic Heritage Trust is performing in comparison to Australia's Mawson's Huts Foundation, underlining differences in approach and effectiveness.

As a Literature Review I will focus on documents produced by both organisations.

Firstly, I will review and assess the AHT and MHF websites.

Their websites stand as the single most important interface with the wider community for both the AHT and MHF. They effectively introduce the AHT and MHF to their publics and coordinate funding and donation collection into the narrower focus of conservation. Charitable organisations see websites as the business end and cutting edge of their activities. A second rate website produces a moribund interaction with the public and condemns the charitable organisation to mediocrity.

The second part of the review will assess other literature produced by AHT and MHF.

Conclusions will be made as to the effectiveness of the literature and information contained in websites and books and parallels drawn where applicable and distinctions highlighted where obvious.

Any findings as to the superiority of one organization as opposed to the other is based entirely on subjective reasoning, but an attempt at rationalizing the reasoning is attempted.

Historical Background

New Zealand's Antarctic history derives from the period of Antarctic exploration known as the Heroic Era of exploration 1895-1917 which saw four expedition parties build substantial wooden bases in the Ross Sea region of Antarctica. Those bases, and the thousands of artifacts associated with them still stand.

In 2007 all four sites were named on the World Monuments Fund 2008 list of the 100 Most Endangered Sites in the World. This listing clearly established their status amongst the greatest heritage sites in the world.

The four sites are;

British Southern Cross Expedition 1898-1900

Led by Carsten Borchgrevink. The expedition hut is located on Cape Adare.

National Antarctic (Discovery) Expedition 1901-1904

Led by Captain Robert Falcon Scott. The expedition hut is located on Hut Point. The hut dimensions are 11m x 11m.

British Antarctic (Nimrod) Expedition 1907-1909

Led by Sir Ernest Shackleton. The expedition hut is located on Cape Royds. The hut dimensions are 7m x 5.8m.

National Antarctic (Terra Nova) Expedition 1910-1913

Led by Captain Robert Falcon Scott. The expedition hut is located on Cape Evans. The huts dimensions are 15m x 7.6m.

Australia's Antarctic history derives from the Australasian Antarctic Expedition 1911-1914 led by Douglas Mawson. The expedition hut is located on Cape Denison. Restoration of the hut started in late 1984.

When Mawson revisited his old hut in 1931 during the BANZARE expedition he was surprised to find the hut still standing. He said at the time,

“Remarkable effects of snow-blast erosion were evidenced on the exposed timbers... in many places the planks had thus been reduced in thickness by more than half an inch. Inside, which had been sealed so long, great masses of delicate ice-crystals hung in festoons”.

Despite Mawson's dismissal of his old hut and adjoining sites as unworthy of consideration the MHF was charged with its preservation as well as that of the following sites.

Magnetograph House

Absolute Magnetic Hut

Transit Hut

Memorial Cross – erected in memory of expedition members Belgrave Ninnis and Xavier Mertz in 1913.

My starting point for comparison of AHT and MHF are the following mission statements.

Antarctic Heritage Trust (Antarctic Heritage Trust website)

Conserving in perpetuity the human heritage in the Ross Sea region of Antarctica for the benefit of all by demonstrating leadership, innovation and professionalism.

The trustees are working to 4 strategic objectives;

1. Implement the Ross Sea Heritage Restoration Project
2. Develop international education and outreach partnerships to inspire people with the heroic era of exploration
3. Raise funds and the profile of Antarctic heritage internationally.
4. Effectively govern and manage the Trust

Mawson's Hut Foundation (Mawson's Huts Foundation website)

The Mawson's Huts Foundation has been established to conserve in perpetuity for the Australian people the unique, historical buildings known as Mawson's Huts, base for one of the most significant expeditions in Antarctic history. The Foundation's website provides a variety of resources concerning current and future efforts to conserve the huts and to disseminate information about this singular archaeological and heritage site.

The Hut Restoration Projects

The AHT website lists the following information about the Antarctic huts.

The four expedition bases have stood in the Ross Sea region of Antarctica for over a century and although Antarctica covers only an estimated 9% of the Earth's land surface, it contains more than 80% of the world's fresh water locked in its ice. It is also the driest place on the planet. Until recently that contradiction has helped to slow the rate of decay of the bases.

From 1987 to 2001 annual basic maintenance was carried out but in 2001 the Trust, together with an international group of conservation/heritage experts, recognised an international conservation effort was needed to ensure these sites survived for future generations.

In 2002, HRH Princess Anne, launched the Trust's Ross Sea Heritage Restoration Project (RSHRP) in Antarctica. It is an international, long-term cold climate project to secure the four bases and conserve the thousands of artifacts associated with the sites.

At around the same time the international community began to recognise the importance of these sites. That view was reinforced when [The Getty Foundation](#) made significant funding available for the project and the [World Monuments Fund](#) listed all four sites on their 2008 list of 100 Most Endangered Sites on Earth. They are also protected under the [Antarctic Treaty System](#).

In 2009 we can report the work programme is on schedule. Work to save [Sir Ernest Shackleton's base](#) and the 5,000+ artefact collection is all but complete and work is well underway to save [Captain Scott's base](#) at Cape Evans. Fundraising for this site is steady and the Trust has been offered a matched funding challenge meaning every dollar raised will be matched.

(Antarctic Heritage Trust website)

The MHF lists the following information about its project

Since its establishment in 1996 the Foundation has raised nearly \$5 million in grants and sponsorship from the Federal Government, corporate Australia and individuals which has allowed six major expeditions to be mounted. The Foundation has just completed a detailed five year plan in conjunction with and endorsed by the Australian Antarctic Division. This allows for expeditions to be sent to Cape Denison each year leading up to the Centenary of the departure from Hobart in December 1911 of the Australasian Antarctic Expedition.

Funds, equipment and supplies are now being sought for the 2008-9 expedition which will focus on conserving the thousands of artefacts left behind by Mawson and his team when they walked out of the huts in December 1913. These are priceless objects and to assist with their conservation a mobile laboratory has been constructed (2007-8 expedition) and will be equipped with the latest technology this summer. This will provide a facility for conservators to help restore and conserve the artefacts without having to return all of them to Australia for treatment.

In addition to these annual expeditions the Foundation is seeking funds to develop a Special Trust Fund of a minimum of three million dollars which invested, will fund expeditions and special projects for the conservation of the huts in future.

(Mawson's Huts Foundation website)

The Main Body of Information for the Projects

A closer examination of information available for one of the hut projects will emphasise the detailed nature of the AHT website. The [British Antarctic \(Nimrod\) Expedition 1907 - 1909](#), Ernest Shackleton's expedition, will serve as an exemplar for the wider Ross Sea Hut Restoration Project. Detailing all the information for the four huts is, I consider, not necessary to show the breadth and scope of the whole Nimrod Expedition heading.operation. The following information is on the AHT website under the

The Ross Sea Heritage Restoration Project (AntarcticHeritage Trust website)

The Trust's Ross Sea Heritage Restoration Project (RSHRP) is a long-term, cold climate heritage project to conserve the four sites and associated 15,000+ artifact collection. The project presents many technical challenges including environmental issues such as katabatic winds, high relative humidity, temperature change, salt damage and light levels.

[Conservation Plans](#) have been prepared for each of the four sites. The plans (reviewed by relevant international agencies) provide the proposed conservation for the sites and are, to our knowledge, the most comprehensive heritage conservation documents ever produced for a polar heritage site. All conservation work (while recognising the realities and constraints of working in Antarctica) follows international best practice and the ICOMOS Charter (Venice Charter 1964). Work is also carried out in line with the Antarctica Environmental Protection Act (Madrid Protocol 1991) and work is permitted through the New Zealand Government. The physical conservation of the sites began during the summer of 2003/04 and since 2006 the Trust has been working year round in Antarctica. Work to secure [Sir Ernest Shackleton's base](#) and the 5,000+ artefact collection is all complete and work is now focused on saving the base associated with [Captain Scott's 1911](#) attempt for the South Pole.

The AHT website has links to the four projects. I will follow the link to the following information on the AHT website.

Shackleton's Expedition Base, Cape Royds (Antarctic Heritage Trust website)

The expedition base associated with [Sir Ernest Shackleton's 1907 expedition](#) is located at Cape Royds and was the first site to be saved as part of the Ross Sea Heritage Restoration Project.

Project Timing: 2004 - 2008.

Status: Building confirmed as structurally secure and weather-tight and the planned conservation programme for the 5,000+ artefact collection is complete. Minor conservation works are planned for the garage and stable area over the next two/three summer seasons. Annual maintenance will occur each summer.

Fundraising for this site is complete and a Capital Maintenance Fund established in the name of Mrs Audrey Dance.

Summary of Work Completed to Secure the Site

Work to Secure Building.

Roof. The roof has been reclad and the original battens re-laid overtop. This has been crucial to keep the building weather-tight and secure.

Repair to the Building Fabric. Conservation and repairs have been undertaken on the timber cladding and Mawson's lab has been relined. Again, critical to keep the building weather-tight and secure. Modern doors and windows (put in during the 1970's) were removed and replaced with historically accurate materials based on the original architectural drawings.

Removal of ice from underneath the Hut. In 2006/07 the team removed over 40 cubic metres of solid ice from underneath the site, fitted a waterproof cladding and reworked gradients to ensure water flows around the site rather than underneath it.

The removal of decaying expedition provisions around southern and eastern walls. Boxes of original provisions stored in 'Venesta' cases stacked around the exterior walls had decayed significantly and were causing both structural and environmental damage. During 2003/04 the cases were removed, inspected, and treated accordingly. Approximately 75 of the Venesta cases have been conserved, filled with original provisions and returned to the site.

Work to Secure the Artefact Collection. From 2006 - 2008 an international team of conservators worked year round in Antarctica conserving the 5,000+ artefact collection. Conservation of the collection is now complete. Ongoing basic conservation of the collection will be needed. A small amount of onsite conservation in the garage and stables area will occur over the next 2-3 summer seasons.

Reconfiguration of Interior. During the 2006/07 season the conservation team, using original expedition photos and diaries, returned the layout of the interior of the hut to reflect the occupation of Shackleton's 1907-09 expedition.

The MHF lists the following information regarding its hut restoration projects. It is important to note the projects are all at the same geographical location, Cape Denison.

Mawson's historic site consists of four huts and other historical remains.

The Main Hut is actually two prefabricated expedition huts – originally planned for separate locations – which were built together to form the Main Hut. Timber uprights were placed in holes blasted in bedrock, and held in place with rock and ice, before being joined to form a frame and clad with Baltic pine boards. They provide a living hut with a workshop leading off it. The entire structure is still complete but largely ice-filled. The frame building is clad in tongue and grooved Baltic pine boards with little or no insulation material added. It has a distinctive pyramidal roof over a square plan with verandahs on three sides – enclosed to provide storage and insulation space. Its survival in the most severe of polar climates attests to the merit of Mawson's design and its great strength of structure.

Magnetograph House – still intact and largely ice free.

Absolute Magnetic Hut – now in ruins with the roof lost, walls largely collapsed, and is ice filled.

Transit Hut – still standing but in poor condition with sections of the walls eroded.

Memorial Cross – erected in memory of expedition members Belgrave Ninnis and Xavier Mertz in 1913. Sitting poles for magnetic observation, wireless masts and various artefacts including a sledge and other equipment are scattered and also in a poor state. Mawson's Huts are entered in the Register of the National Estate and the Main Hut and Memorial Cross are recognised as Historic Monuments by the Antarctic Treaty Parties. The Australian Heritage Commission has recommended that the whole of the Cape Denison establishment be recognised as an historic zone. Mawson's Huts represent the only in-situ evidence of early Australian Antarctic research. Among the many scientific achievements of Mawson's Expedition was the first use of radio on the Antarctic continent, linking the base at Cape Denison with mainland Australia via the relay station established on Macquarie Island, for the continuous recording and transmission of meteorological observations.

The Main Hut

The AAE's winter base is considered the primary historic artifact at Cape Denison.

Commonly known as the Main Hut, it combines two expedition buildings into one. The pyramid-roofed hut, measuring just 7.3m square, provided sleeping, kitchen, dining, laundry, storage and darkroom facilities for 18 men. The adjoining hip-roofed hut measures 5.5m x 4.9m and was equipped as a workshop, complete with wireless equipment and generator, lathe, stove, and benches for the carpenter, mechanic and scientists. Skylights in the living quarters' roof provided natural light, while an acetylene generator mixed calcium carbide and water to create the acetylene gas used as artificial lighting.

Needless to say, space was cramped. "Taken all in all," remarked Laseron, "if the desire had come to swing the proverbial cat, it would have been hard on the cat." A 1.5m wide verandah surrounded the structure on three sides. The section surrounding the living quarters stored food and other supplies and biological specimens. Next to the biological store area a structure of benzine cases provided a makeshift aircraft hanger, where Bickerton transformed the AAE's first wingless aeroplane (damaged before departure) into a tractor sledge. The workshop's western verandah provided the entrance porch, latrine, and trapdoor access to the meat cellar; the eastern verandah housed the sled dogs. An auroral observatory was attached to the northern face of the workshop. During winter, when the hut was encased in drift snow metres thick, access tunnels were dug from the western verandah to the outside world. Even so, the men were occasionally required to exit the workshop via a trap door in the verandah roof.

(Mawson's Huts Foundation website)

Conclusion

A thorough review of the websites of the Antarctic Heritage Trust and the Mawson's Huts Foundation leads me to the conclusion that there are, by necessity, far more similarities than differences.

Primarily, websites are designed with a single purpose in mind. That purpose is often well disguised with great swathes of information designed to enhance the viewers' experience. The aim is to educate the viewer and to simultaneously develop the viewers' empathy with the subject of the website.

But, ultimately the website has a 'business point'. That point is the area where the viewer is invited to transfer his/her passive empathy with the subject of the website into active support. The active support is financial.

The websites exist ostensibly to educate and for historical posterity. The more they can disguise their real motive behind a human face the more effective they will be in attaining their primary motive.

One must remember that the primary motive for the website is to gain pecuniary advantage.

How well does the Antarctic Heritage Trust website compare with the Mawson's Huts Foundation website?

The answer is entirely subjective. One's preference for one website over another can come down to a simple preference for font and layout. It could equally come down to usability and clarity of purpose. However, where the websites are expertly engineered, as they are with both organisations, then the point of difference tends to revolve around usability and which is more interesting.

On the simple basis of looking into the websites and getting transported into the Heroic Age of Exploration I definitely find the Antarctic Heritage Trust website superior.

It scores highly on font and layout and has a plethora of information that is well organised. The usage of blank space is often overlooked in website construction yet is fundamental to success.

Just as it is axiomatic in watercolour paintings, that it is equally important to have blank space as painted space, in website construction the same holds true.

Herein lies the Antarctic Heritage Trust's innate superiority over the Mawson's Huts Foundation. The usage of space is natural and lends to attracting the viewer into it. Once beyond the Homepage the viewer is carried along effortlessly from link to link.

The information is imparted effortlessly and expertly and the overall experience is satisfying. The website is a pleasure to be submerged in.

The Mawson's Huts Foundation website is excellent and largely achieves what it sets out to achieve. However, the Antarctic Heritage Trust website is considerably superior. It is eye-catching and artistic yet wholly informative and stream-lined in its efficiency. The comparison is certainly favourable for New Zealand's Antarctic heritage conservation effort.

Part 2

The following media release indicates in some measure the favourable financial climate and conditions the MHF operates within. By comparison the AHT does not receive the same level of government support.

The Hon Peter Garrett AM MP
Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts

\$1.2M for Antarctic science and heritage conservation

Media release
13 October 2009

Federal Environment and Heritage Minister Peter Garrett today announced over \$1.2 million for conservation of Antarctic heritage, and scientific research.

“\$486,000 in funding for the historic Mawson’s Hut at Cape Denison in the Australian Antarctic Territory will include removing ice and snow from the interior of the huts and recovering and cataloguing historic artifacts from Mawson’s expedition,” Mr Garrett said.

“Sir Douglas Mawson’s incredible pioneering spirit and courage is epitomised in the wooden huts that still stand in the harsh environment of Antarctica,” Mr Garrett said.

“Built between 1912 and 1913, these National Heritage-listed huts need urgent conservation to ensure their long-term survival. This is one of Australia’s most important historic sites as it was from here that Mawson’s team studied weather, geology and magnetics on the Antarctic continent, enriching the world’s knowledge of this remarkable area.

Furthermore, the MHF benefits from the sale of the ‘coffee table’ book below. The book is a high quality production and the pricing structure certainly reflects this.

Mawson’s Huts **The Birthplace of Australia’s Antarctic Heritage** **Mawson’s Huts Foundation, (Allen & Unwin, 2008)**

Price: AUD\$95.00 (plus \$5.00 freight within Australia, \$25.00 International) Limited Edition Leather-bound Copy: AUD\$400.00 (plus \$25.00) Freight.

Mawson’s Huts – The Birthplace of Australia’s Antarctic Heritage has been produced by the Mawson’s Huts Foundation in partnership with the Australian Antarctic Division to generate revenue for the ongoing conservation of the huts. Published by Allen and Unwin, this *coffee table style* book (305mm by 295mm) contains over 200 high quality images including the largest ever published collection of historic images by Mawson’s official photographer Frank Hurley – many being published for the first time. Plus over 100 contemporary colour images capturing the huts as they are today and the raw beauty of Cape Denison and the region’s wildlife.

By way of comparison, I posed the following questions to Nigel Watson, Executive Director of AHT. The answers highlight the difference in financial support for the two organizations, even more so, when it is taken into consideration that the scope of the AHT's mandate encompasses four geographically distinct restoration projects compared to the single focus of the MHF.

What is the operational budget for AHT?

Revenue \$4.7M. Expenditure \$3.9M of which operational grants are \$584K and admin and governance expenses are \$508K.

How much did you receive directly from the government last financial year?

Direct grant from Vote Arts, Culture and Heritage was \$526K.

What is the major way you finance your activities? (ie. donations or subscriptions or public appeal etc.)

Vote funding is 16% of the Trust's total income. 84% of total cash income from non government sources primarily from donations and grants from NZ and offshore agencies, individuals and benefactors.

In summary, the reviewer is left with a strong sense and understanding that the Antarctic Heritage Trust and the Mawson's Huts Foundation are comparable organizations charged with similar tasks. Generally speaking, their approaches are very similar. Their similarities are far greater than their differences.

Perhaps any preference the reviewer has for the Antarctic Heritage Trust over the Mawson's Huts Foundation is one of style rather than substance. The reviewer, however, is left with a decided preference for the overall scope appearance and presentation of the Antarctic Heritage Trust.

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